

Stephanie Wise
701 E. 7th Ave
Ellensburg, WA 98926
(509)925-3733

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To the Three-Tier Review Task Force:

I am writing to express my very deep concern that the review of the Washington state three-tier system of distributing and selling beer and wine may result in some form of deregulation to the current system.

As a substance abuse prevention professional, grandmother of six children, and concerned citizen, I am especially concerned that to my knowledge the current task force process has not included the review of data that correlates increased alcohol availability and decreased price to misuse and abuse by adults and to early initiation of use by children.

According to the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, alcohol is the drug of choice among youth in the United States. It is more likely to kill young people than all illegal drugs combined. Each year 1,900 people under the age of 21 die in motor vehicle crashes that involve underage drinking in our country.

Nearly half of all 8th graders in our country report having had at least one drink and over 20 percent report having been drunk. Consuming 5 or more drinks at one time for males or 4 or more drinks at one time for females are considered binge drinking. Nearly 1/3 of all 12th graders have participated in binge drinking.

In addition to the brain damage that can occur in developing brains from drinking alcohol – especially to the areas of the brain that process memory, physical skills, and coordination – people who reported starting to drink alcohol before the age of 15 are 4 times more likely than those who delayed onset of use to become dependent on alcohol at some point in their life.

It seems inevitable that any deregulation of the current system would increase the amount of alcoholic beverages that are sold in our Washington state communities. This in turn will increase the misuse of alcohol by adult problem drinkers and increase the ability of underage drinkers to obtain alcohol. Nationally the alcohol industry makes an estimated \$22.5 billion by selling to underage drinkers and another \$25.8 billion from sales to alcoholics and other problem drinkers, according to a recent report from the National Center of Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA). And nearly 17.6 million adult Americans abuse alcohol or are alcoholic. Health impacts from misuse and abuse include:

- Heavy drinking can increase risk for cancers, especially those of the liver, esophagus, throat, and larynx.
- Heavy drinking can also cause cirrhosis, immune system problems, brain damage, and harm to the fetus during pregnancy.
- Drinking increases the risk of death to all of us from alcohol-related car crashes as well as recreational and job related injuries.

In economic terms, alcohol-related problems cost our country approximately \$185 billion per year.

In our state, the current three-tier system has involved controls that help to minimize the negative impact of alcohol use, and yet we face daunting problems related to substance abuse. We will see our own statistics of abuse and misuse soar, if current controls are weakened.

Consider these Washington state statistics related to substance abuse, identified by the Governor's Council on Substance Abuse:

- An annual economic loss of \$2.54 billion.
- A chemical dependency rate of 68% for inmates new to the adult corrections system.
- Abuse of alcohol and/or other drugs by four out of five youth entering the juvenile justice system.
- 44% of children in foster care have birth mothers who abused alcohol and/or other drugs during pregnancy.

In the substance abuse prevention field and in many families and communities, we work each day to help move towards a culture where heavy drinking is not the norm. We do this to create healthy communities and better futures for our children. There have been huge leaps forward in our prevention science, and we now have the systemic knowledge and skills to effect community-wide change and reinforce norms of responsible use of alcohol. Please help us move in this direction and do not make recommendations that will deregulate the distribution and sales of beer and wine, which in turn will create further negative social, health, and economic impacts in our state.

It would be a pleasure to share more information with you about prevention science, particularly the positive outcomes and reductions in substance abuse that can be achieved through public policy and environmental strategies. Please let me know if I can be of any assistance in the important work you are engaged upon.

Sincerely,



Stephanie Wise